

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 ADDIS 09839 191547Z

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ACTION AF-18

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R 191433Z AUG 74

FM AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 636

INFO AMCONSUL ASMARA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY MOGADISCIO

AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

USCINCEUR

C O N F I D E N T I A L ADDIS ABABA 9839

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT PGOV ET

SUBJ: ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH ATTACKS DRAFT CONSTITUTION

REF: A) ADDIS 9799 B) ADDIS 9797 AND 9770 C) ADDIS 9779 PARA 8

SUMMARY: A MEMORANDUM PUBLISHED AUGUST 17 BY THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH TAKES OPEN STAND IN OPPOSITION TO STIPULATIONS NEW DRAFT ETHIOPIAN CONSTITUTION CONCERNING IT. THIS MARKS FIRST PUBLIC AND MAJOR DIVERGENCE BETWEEN EOC AND REFORM MOVEMENT. REACTION TO PUBLIC POSITION OF CHURCH WILL BEAR WATCHING. IN TAKING POSITION AGAINST MAJOR COMPONENT PROPOSED NEW CONSTITUTION, EOC HIERACHY IS NOT ALONE. OTHER INTERESTS ALSO CONCERNED WITH PROBLEMS WHICH MIGHT FLOW FROM ADOPTION OF DOCUMENT AND WILL BE WORKING TO EITHER ALTER OR SHELVE IT. END SUMMARY.

1. PRESS AUGUST 18, FRONTPAGES EXCERPTS OF MEMORANDUM "SIGNED IN PRESENCE HIS HOLINESS ABUN TEWOFLOS AND MEMBERS OF THE SYNOD" AT PATRIARCHATE AUGUST 17. (ACCOMPANYING PHOTO SHOWS BISHOPS SIGNING DOCUMENT BEFORE ENTHRONED ABUN.) IN MEMORANDUM, EOC REPORTEDLY "DEEPLY DEPLORES AND OPPOSE SPIRIT  
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PAGE 02 ADDIS 09839 191547Z

AND LETTER OF SOME PROVISIONS DRAFT CONSTITUTION" CONCERNING

CHURCH'S FUTURE ROLE IN ETHIOPIAN SOCIETY.

2. ACCORDING PRESS, MEMORANDUM TO BE SUBMITTED TO PRIMIN AND AFCC. PAPERS SAY MEMORANDUM ARGUES THAT DRAFT CONSTITUTION WOULD RELEGATE ESTABLISHED CHURCH TO POSITION NO RPT NO DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF ANY OTHER DENOMINATION OR FAITH AND REMOVE IT FROM GOVERNMENT OF EMPIRE. THIS SHOULD NOT BE. DRAFT CONSTITUTION, MEMO REPORTEDLY ASSERTS, SEEKS DRIVE WEDGE BETWEEN EOC AND THE PEOPLE. "THIS IS DANGEROUS AND SINCE PEOPLE CANNOT SUPPORT THIS STAND THE CHURCH WILL NOT SUPPORT STAND TAKEN BY DRAFT CONSTITUTION ON RELIGION." AFTER EXPLAINING THAT PROPOSED DISESTABLISHMENT OF EOC WOULD LAY ETHIOPIAN CULTURE OPEN TO PENETRATION DELETERIOUS "COLONIZING" FOREIGN INFLUENCES AND, IN EFFECT, ROB THE FAITHFUL OF THEIR RELIGION, MEMO URGES THAT ORTHODOXY BE KEPT AS THE NATIONAL FAITH UNDER THE NEW CONSTITUTION; CONSTITUTION ENSURE THAT THE CHURCH'S AUTHORITY TO CONSECRATE THE EMPEROR AT HIS CORONATION CONTINUING TO BE RECOGNIZED; THE EOC REMAIN REPRESENTED IN PARLIAMENT; AND THAT NEW CONSTITUTION PROVIDE FOR ELECTION OF A PATRIARCH.

3. EMBASSY HAS SECURED FULL TEXT OF MEMO AND WILL ADD TO FOREGOING IF NECESSARY ONCE TRANSLATION IN HAND.

4. COMMENT: FOREGOING SUGGESTS THAT CHURCH'S STATUS, INFLUENCE, CAPACITY TO COMPETE FOR ALLEGIANCE, REVENUES AND ABILITY SUPPORT ITS CLERGY SEEN AT ISSUE. WITH RESPECT TO LATTER, MOSLEM MEMBER CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE FELT PROPOSED DISESTABLISHMENT OF EOC SHOULD ENTAIL LOSS CHURCH/MONASTERY LAND HOLDINGS AND THAT RESOURCES CHURCH AND FAITHFUL SHOULD THEREAFTER SUPPORT SUCH (SHRUNKEN?) EOC CLERGY AS MAY THEN STILL BE DEPENDENT ON "CHURCH LAND." EOC REPS HAD TAKEN POSITION BEFORE CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE THAT CHURCH NO RPT NO LONGER HAD LARGE LAND HOLDINGS. MUCH "CHURCH LAND" ACTUALLY HELD BY MONASTERIES. STILL MORE, ORIGINALLY GIVEN TO CLERGY TO FARM FOR THEIR SUPPORT, HAD BEEN HANDED DOWN IN CLERICAL FAMILIES AS PRIVATE PROPERTY.

5. OVERT OPPOSITION TO PORTION DRAFT CONSTITUTION OF ABUN AND HOLY SYNOD MARKS FIRST AND MAJOR PUBLIC DIVERGENCE BETWEEN ESTABLISHED CHURCH AND REFORM MOVEMENT. REACTION THIS CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 ADDIS 09839 191547Z

MAY GENERATE WILL GIVE US INDICATOR OF SIGNIFICANCE ROLE EOC MAY STILL BE ABLE TO PLAY IN CURRENT CONTEXT. STRONG STAND IN FAVOR STATUS QUO ANTE POSITION OF CHURCH CONFIDES WITH SECULARIZING/MODERNIZING TIDE BUT MAY WELL GARNER SUPPORT AMONG THOSE IN URBAN MIDDLE CLASS WHO FEEL THREATENED BY TREND OF EVENTS. RURAL REACTION WILL BE OF PARTICULAR INTEREST.

6. CLEARLY, CHURCH HIERARCHY, WHICH HAS "LAIN LOW" SINCE

FEBRUARY, BELIEVES IT IS NOW NECESSARY TO TAKE A STAND. IN SO DOING, IT IS NOT RPT NOT ALONE. THERE MUCH LATENT OPPOSITION TO THIS OR THAT PROVISION OF DRAFT CONSTITUTION. SOURCE ON CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE WAS FRANK TO SAY THAT ITS MOSLEM MEMBERS (AMONG OTHERS) WORKED PRIMARILY FOR PAROCHIAL INTERESTS OF THEIR COMMUNITY IN CASE CONSTITUTION ACTUALLY COMES INTO FORCE, WHICH HE DOUBTED. "IT IS TYPICALLY ETHIOPIAN DOCUMENT, VERY IDEALISTIC AND HARD TO IMPLEMENT." SOME CHRISTIAN MILITARY SAID TO FEAR THAT LOWERING OF VOTING REQUIREMENTS WOULD LEAD TO ELECTION INCREASING NUMBER OF MOSLEM DEPUTIES IN PARLIAMENT. GROWTH THIS GROUP MIGHT THEN, IN COALITION WITH OTHER INTERESTS, BRING ABOUT SELECTION OF "PRIMIN NAMED MOHAMED," WHICH ETHIOPIAN CHRISTIANS ALLEGEDLY WOULD NOT TOLERATE. EMBASSY HEARS WITH INCREASING FREQUENCY OF LATE THAT IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS OF CONSTITUTION SUCH THAT "WHEN MILITARY TAKE OVER" THEY WILL PUT CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM ON ICE (CF REF B).  
WYMAN

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